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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, January 4, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "MEAT COOKERY METHODS." Information from the Office of Experiment Stations, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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When cooks disagree -- well, that's not always as serious as when doctors disagree. But it may be pretty hard on the fellow who has to eat the cooked food.

And that reminds me of meat. Up to a few years ago cooks couldn't agree on the best methods of meat cookery. You could work up an argument any time among cookery experts just by asking the best way to roast beef or cook ham. And the argument never ended because the cooks had nothing to go on but hearsay and personal experience. No scientific tests had been made to find which cooking method brought the best results.

As an example of how cooks once disagreed, Alice Childs of the Minnesota Station tells about writing several hundred letters asking how to cook ham. The letters went to housewives who prided themselves on their cooking, to chefs in hotels, to cooking teachers, to tearoom managers -- all people who might be expected to agree on a simple and familiar process like cooking ham. Well, Miss Childs got 500 replies from 500 cooks -- and scarcely any of them agreed.

As Miss Childs says, that was especially bad with a food like meat where right cooking is so very important. The finest piece of meat can be entirely spoiled by wrong cooking while even a poor cut of meat can be made to taste very good by right cooking.

Fortunately for everyone who likes meat, those days of disagreement are past. For over 10 years now Federal and State laboratories have been running meat cookery tests. And today the experts agree generally on standard methods for roasting beef, pork, veal, lamb and ham as well as cooking ham in water. Twenty million cuts of meat can't be wrong -- and almost that many have been used over the years in these tests.

Among the questions which the tests have settled is the one about cooking ham in water. You won't find any up-to-date cook anymore who boils ham. In fact, that expression "boiled ham" will probably go out of our language one of these days. For the tests have proved that ham is far better if it is simmered. By the way, that rule holds for any other meat cooked in water. Slower cooking makes more delicious meat.

Another result of these tests is that the meat thermometer has come into wide use. The tests have proved once and for all that it is much easier to cook a roast perfectly by interior temperature than by time -- than by the old rule of so many minutes per pound. You see, roasts differ in the amount of fat and lean, bone and gristle they contain, and each of these carried heat at a different rate. So time is less accurate than the temperature inside the meat.

Cooks used to disagree on the question of why roasts lost juice in cooking and became dry. The tests have showed that loss of juice depends partly on the cut and partly on the method of cooking, but that too much heat is one of the big reasons for a dry roast. So the experts now agree that a moderately slow oven is best. They advise 300 degrees Fahrenheit for roasting beef, lamb and veal and 350 for pork.

Another idea held by many cooks was that searing a roast at a high temperature first was necessary to hold in the juices. But the meat cookery tests have proved not. You can sear or not, as you please, but you save time, fuel, effort and spattering of grease if you roast your meat at an even moderate temperature. The flavor and tenderness of the roast is just the same.

It looks as if the cover on the roaster will soon retire permanently, for the experts now agree that roasts are better cooked without a cover. Meat roasted uncovered looks better, tastes better, and is more juicy. Until recently cooks thought that veal at least should roast under cover. But now they agree that even veal makes a better roast cooked in an open pan.

To baste or not to baste during roasting is another question argued through the years. The tests showed that if a roast is set in an open pan, fat side up, the fat melts and runs down over the meat. So the roast bastes itself and the cook doesn't have to bother.

Have you ever wondered which was better--a rib roast of beef with the bones left in, or one of those rolled roasts with the bones removed which you see at the meat market? Some cooks buy the boned and rolled roasts because they are easy to carve. But the meat investigators found that for flavor, juiciness and economy in cooking, the rib roast with the bones left in was the best buy. During the tests, the investigators cooked standing and rolled roasts from the same animal. The standing roasts proved to be more juicy, better in flavor, and took less time to cook. So on 3 counts at least the meat with the bones left in was better. Maybe I'd better say 4 counts, because when the meat is gone, the bones are left for soup.

Cooks have differed as to whether to add salt to a roast first or last--that is, at the beginning or the end of the cooking. The investigators say that either way is all right. You may draw out a little extra juice by adding salt to a roast at the beginning, but you'll get a little better flavor. And you can use that juice in the gravy. Or you can add the salt just before the roast comes from the oven.

What equipment is best for roasting meat? The investigators agree that all you need is a sheet iron pan of the right size, a rack to hold the roast off the bottom to prevent scorching, and a thermometer.

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